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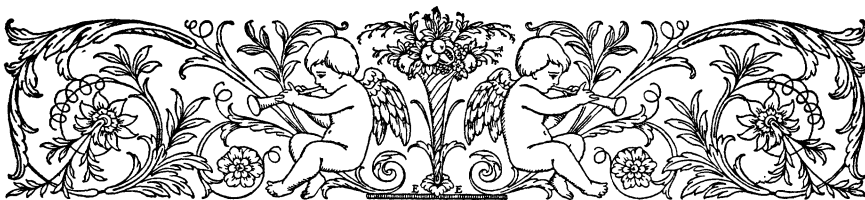
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## OF STRENGTH, BEAUTY AND SATISFACTION IN MUSIC

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By W. S. B. MATHEWS<sup>1</sup>

AS an evolution-document the modern art of music is one of the most creditable (and significant) productions of the mind of man. Its material, tone (purified sound), has been evolved expressly for the purposes of this art, and for no other use whatever. Its forms, or principles of organization, wherein they are not purely rhythmic and thus derived from the dance, rest ultimately upon principles of unity derived from the inner organization of tone itself, wherein nature gave us ready made that first step in harmony, the common chord. The musical sense, to which this art addresses itself, is also a highly specialized and cultivated form of hearing and remembering, and the vast output of compositions in the higher forms illustrates the power with which this acquired means of expression has taken hold of man's imagination. Moreover, the art-products of music cover a wider range and a greater variety of individuality than is to be found in the products of any other art whatever, a circumstance itself capable of explanation, as we will see. Moreover, the future is rich with promise for this art, since as long as man hears and imagines, the gifted ones will create in every generation ever new products, phrased according to the inner consciousness of that generation, and at times of the race itself. Thus the art has wide ranges, and far-reaching relations.

The popular analysis of music into three co-operative elements of Rhythm, Melody and Harmony, is of use from certain

<sup>1</sup>This essay was left by Mr. Mathews at his death in 1912. Mrs. Blanche Dingley Mathews, the widow of the distinguished author and editor of "Music," suggested publication in "The Musical Quarterly." The suggestion was accepted as a matter of course.—*Ed.*

standpoints; nevertheless it is not radical. Rhythm, while enjoying in music a complication and extension far surpassing its action in any other art, nevertheless remains of the same essential quality as in the dance and verse; a matter of number, accent and proportion. Eliminating Rhythm, Melody and Harmony remain as principles of tonal organization, peculiarly musical. That is to say, the Melodic and Harmonic tonal movement is the central thing in music; the one thing which music has which all the not-musics do without.

## II.

All the fine music we hear pleases us first of all as a sensation of ear. The entire art of music has grown up from the root of the natural pleasure of the ear in tone. Tone might be characterized as an audible crystal of sound; a sound which, in place of containing conflicting vibrations, consists exclusively of vibrations related in definite proportions to each other, as in the case of molecules aggregating themselves into the forms we know as crystals. Out of this germ, actual pleasure in the sensation of pure sound, all music has taken its origin. The first tone (may have been) a twanging bowstring; and presently they had discovered other sounds of like quality, and thus some kind of stringed instrument was evolved, affording two or more degrees of pitch, which the untutored musician alternated and played changes upon, in a rude rhythm. This went on for an unknown time during which probably no rational melody or tonal unity was discovered. All the music was arbitrary, tentative—a seeking after something to satisfy the latent art-sense of man. Pleasure of ear is still a powerful force and attraction in music, increased beyond its early strength by as much as the variety of tones and tone-combinations has been increased in the evolution.

Now the act of hearing ceases when the incitation stops, *i. e.*, as soon as the vibration ceases. But in this minute fragment of time the ear manages to report many things concerning its sensations.

The number and variety of chords in modern music is very great and each one of them has to the ear its own acoustical quality, according to the combinations of vibrations which make it up. While the simpler chords in music are all individually much alike, and are soon disposed of, the number of complicated chords is constantly increasing; whereby the variety of individual ear-tastes in chords is greatly augmented and the exercises of ear, if not its pleasures, are greatly increased above the range of

sensation which existed in Mozart's time or that of Bach. The musician knows instantly every individual chord as it falls upon the ear, just as the listener recognizes every word in a spoken discourse in a language which he speaks.

In the higher forms of music the variety and range of tone-color is also continually tending to augment, which again affords the ear a greater range of incitation. And each act of this kind of sensation ceases the moment the vibration ceases.

Music, however, requires something more than ear; it may be ever so agreeable a sensation, but it begins to be music, in an art-sense, only when the mind takes it up and finds Idea in it. Every single chord or tone of melody has in it the acoustical quality which the ear takes up; but it also has in it other qualities, which the mind adds to these reports of sensation; namely, the qualities of connection and dependence. The ear knows nothing of connection and dependence; it knows sensations, pure and simple. The moment the listener recognizes connection and dependence, his mind is working; subconsciously, it may be, but working nevertheless. It is a question of memory and expectation. The mind keeps tab on the series of sense-acts, and adds to each one its own due of memory and expectation. For example, suppose a melody, like "Home, Sweet Home," the sol-fa running (ignore rhythm) *Do-mi-fa-soh-me*, etc. Now the tones individually are more or less agreeable to the ear according as they lie withing an easy vocal range, which in this instance they all do. And there is no more innate authority in the pitch designated above as *Do* than in either of the others. Nevertheless, the ear accepts it as the starting point, and refers the next tone *Mi* to the *Do* as bass; *Fa* moves out of the sphere of influence of *Do*, or crosses its territory, but with the *Soh* we are again resting upon *Do*. And so on of all the remainder of the melody, other tones coming in as resting points, especially *Soh* itself and *Fa*, the other two principal points of repose in the major key. The same thing takes place in all melody. Every tone has in it first of all its own sound; then, second, this that the mind adds to the acoustical effect, the mental quality of "place in key," as belonging to either of the primitive spheres of influence in the folks-tone or keys. And this goes on all through.

There is another element in melody, two of them in fact. First, an element corresponding to that which in a sentence we designate as subject or predicate. A phrase in music is much the same as in speech, either something which we will speak of later, or something we speak concerning a subject previously

stated. The subject element in melody is the tendency away from the tonic, or remaining upon tonic without having been away from it, as happens often in Beethoven. A predicate is a phrase which tends back to the tonic, after something has happened away from the tonic. But always, you observe, a mental addition to what the ear hears, due to memory or longer retention of the sense-impression in the mind; and an expectation of what is likely or necessary to follow. This is one element in melody.

The other element in melody which the mind adds to what the ear hears, is that of rhythm and the rhythmic balance of phrases. Now rhythm is a quality which is much mentioned, but little understood. It is not, as our elementary books tell us, a matter of long and short; but simply a matter of fluctuations occurring symmetrically. These fluctuations in music are those of measure accent, and those of phrases or accent groups; and when the first phrase of melody is completed, it is like the first line of a poem,—a pattern has been set for the lines and meters to follow. Recognition of such patterns and satisfaction in their symmetrical completion are effects which the mind adds to what the ear hears, and are important parts of our enjoyment in melody. One of the difficulties which the early music of Richard Wagner encountered, arose from his choosing to ignore the conventional expectations of metrical symmetries in his melody, and of carrying it out upon a more purely tonal logic, according to the innate sense of the poem. It took time for the ears to find out that here also was new satisfaction, more musical if less obvious.

Of chords as we hear them, the mental additions are vastly more important than in single tones. The variety of relations in chords is much greater, because in chords of three tones there are some eight or ten elements of possible permutations; and of chords of four tones many more; and each one has its own individual taste to the ear, and each new relation to the key has a different taste to the mind, a change just as noticeable as that arising in words considered as subjects or objects, words of action or of passivity; then there is greater variety of new relations which do not enter into the mere sensation, individually considered, at all; but are nevertheless put there by the mind, and form an important part of the resources of musical expression. One writer, Julius Klauser, goes so far as to claim that only a small fraction of the harmonic possibilities of music have as yet been employed by composers, and that in this department vast opportunities lie open to us, (but this was before Richard Strauss).

The development of musical sense to appreciate the remote relations of connection and dependence involved in such music as that of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, not to mention later great masters, is a process involving much time and intelligent direction as well as inherited aptitude and a good environment. And at this point our musical education is still remiss.

### III.

In all our music, over and above its quality as a series of ear-sensations, and its cognition as such and such purely tonal relations and dependencies, with other qualities of purely tonal beauty, as yet not definable, there lies yet a third element constantly growing in popular estimation, so much so that many suppose it to be the key to the entire art of music itself. This element consists in the impression of human feeling as depicted by the music. If a hundred fairly well cultivated persons were to be asked what in their opinion is the ground object of music, they would by a large majority reply that the primary object of music is to represent human feeling.

Herbert Spencer took this ground and argued from it that music had come up by the way of emotional speech. The myth that music represents feeling is natural enough. It belongs to the class of myths which explain nature. A series of tones in rhythm betokens an intelligent personal author, just as truly as Paley's watch found by the savage on the seashore. Tones in rhythmic arrangement do not arise impersonally; tone itself does not sound impersonally, excepting a few make-believes in the natural singing of a fast-running machine and the machine itself is of personal origin. But Spencer, if he had lived a little later, might have chosen to derive music from the singing of the earlier electric motors, which ran down gradually in pitch until the machine came to rest. Spencer would have obtained the musical scale by subdividing this descending slide of pitch. It is insufficient. It asks too much. It demands ear competence before there has been any ear-experience. Now, we know that they began education in the perception of pitch and the study of its degrees many thousand years ago, thousands of years before the great pyramid; because we find at that time instruments so advanced as to have required very long evolutions for coming upon them, unless we go further with myth and suppose them handed down out of heaven.

Any person who finds comfort in believing that the ultimate rationale of music is the expression of human feeling, is at liberty

to believe it. Nobody can authoritatively contradict him. It may be. But when he says that the development has followed this road, then the facts have to be reckoned with; which show that pleasure in sensation and pleasure in tone relation as such, "musical pleasures" pure and simple, have determined all the advances in music down to the point where we are. It is admitted that during the three centuries of opera great progress has been made in finding ways of a more graphic correspondence of the music with the dramatic moment to which it is set. But this is because in the drama all varieties of human feeling are eventually appealed to, and in following these appeals music has advanced to certain resources of sympathy with such feelings. Some of these are innate, as when *minor* effects accompany grief, and so on; and some of them are conventional, like Monteverdi's tremolo on a diminished chord while suspense lasts until it is known whether the unknown duellist is living or dead.

Nevertheless, Bach began to write after a full century of this chapter in evolution, which itself started with the perfectly well understood fact in Palestrina's time, that music could correspond remarkably to human feeling, which Palestrina tried to make it do in the solemn moments of the mass. Now Bach, while one of the most emotional of men, nevertheless wrote always music; the emotion which it had behind it sometimes flowed in from the text, and sometimes was the unconscious color of his own mood at the moment. Hence, while the feeling led him to interest himself in one motive rather than another, his musical logic led him to develop each motive according to its inmost musical nature, so that whatever of emotionality there is to be found in the product was more unconscious and unsought than otherwise. What Bach busied himself with was Music, as such; and rational music as such. Every piece of his is an individuality, coherent, pronounced and complete; at least all his good ones since even Homer nodded.

This idea of writing music for music's own sake, was the standpoint of the composers during the century, including Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart and the younger Beethoven. Gluck, the opera composer, stood out for poetic depiction; nevertheless in his best moments he also wrote music; and the music he wrote lasts while his description has long since passed into innocuous desuetude.

In the next century the standpoint slightly changed; to the extent that while composers considered the music its own sufficient reason as music, they went farther and conceived that it

might be its own sufficient explanation. This Mendelssohn neatly suggested by his title of "Songs Without Words," as if by close listening the words could be made out from the music. He was nearly right. Words? No! Not words; music has no words. But the moods, Yes! Certainly! And this is the standpoint of what we call the romantic epoch in the evolution of art-music.

#### IV.

Those who suppose that the so-called emotionality of music is due wholly or mainly to the over-worked imagination of biased listeners, fail to take into account the physical facts involved. Music moves upon the sensorium with many and powerful incitations. Consider the merely physical impact of sound-vibrations in a modern orchestral composition, such as those of Tschai-kovsky, Wagner, or Berlioz. Is it supposed that one can fall under this intense bombardment of ear sensations and remain unaffected? Then, too, consider the acoustical tensions and contradictions which exist within the complicated chords, such as all the secondary sevenths, the suspensions and other forms of dissonance. That the careless listener does not feel them marks only his insensibility for the vibration incidents themselves, and the combination tones generated by the tones sounding together, are terribly appealing at times. And the ear certainly recognizes these things and passes them along as vibration incidents to the musical brain. Add to these the contradictions in rhythm which often intensify the great moments, and we have a variety of powerful physical incidents which might seem equal to burning up or blowing down the building itself, so powerful are they. That these should almost stun the hearer, is at times unavoidable.

Moreover, we are made up of conventions and habits. In some way a peculiarly voiced chord gets itself associated with an idea, and straightway when we hear it again we think of the idea. Moreover, people are simply a kind of animals. The dog listening to a violin practice illustrates my point. Note his quiet as his master begins his ascending scale of slow notes, drawing the tone long and carefully. Five notes up, six notes, the dog remains quiet; the seventh appears to occasion disquiet, the eighth makes him anxious; the ninth makes him squirm, the tenth is beyond endurance. He sits up, opens his mouth and howls to his soul's comfort. Evidently, he is giving what we call in music, "sympathetic resonance" to the tone which finally compelled him to break the silence. It was perhaps his own personal key note, and he simply had to give it vent. There is



many a woman in an intense concert who would herself sit up and howl when her note comes, did not convention stand in her way; convention, and her "adventitious" character. Our minds have their underground relations and the subconscious plays a great part in life. Much in life, and everything in art, for in art it is the thing we feel which satisfies us, long before we reach the thing we know.

## V.

The myth of what is called program music is not an impossible conception. While music can never tell a story or describe anything, it is not impossible that a composer of unusual gifts and mighty sensitiveness might be so filled with a great story or character, that the music he writes in that mood will find answering chords in the especially congenial listeners; and that in extreme cases the same story or incident might be suggested to the hearer as his own unconscious myth from the awakening of the same deep springs of sensibility.

It is no more impossible than that an iron diaphragm is able, in response to a quiet human speech, to transmit through a thousand miles of coarse iron wire electric fluctuations of such potency that another iron diaphragm at the other end not only takes up those electric fluctuations, but actually speaks the words and the voice into the ear of the distant listener. This is one of the simple facts of life, which is a greater miracle than any that magician ever pretended. Many a boy has wondered how God could know of His deeds; the farther we go the greater the wonder grows whether God is able to shut off the receiver when He needs a rest.

Thus while the main thing in music is the music as music, a coherent and beautifully expressed discourse in tones; and the production of such discourse, a wholly sufficient reason for the composer and a satisfaction for the hearer; it remains true that human feeling is unquestionably a very important by-product in music. A by-product constantly growing greater as the resources of music are amplified and the capacity of listeners is increased by education and practice.

We may even accept the dictum of Hegel that the ultimate destiny of art is to voice the entire subconscious soul of man. To utter all those aspirations, hopes, reveries, and contests which move and shake the soul, to the end that man may know himself. That eventually all the evil in man will find expression in art as well as his noblest and best moments. Or, like Schopenhauer, as

Wagner understood him, that music is a kind of somnambulist cry of the soul.

Yet wherever we stop, the position of Hanslick is authoritative and demonstrable; that whatever there may be in music, be it much or little besides the music itself, that something can come to the listener in no other way than by hearing the music sufficiently. Whatever the music means is involved in its notes and what those notes imply. Therefore, to become wise in music, is to become a better hearer, a more competent hearer. And when we have thus heard and enjoyed it as music we are in nine cases out of ten as far along as the composer himself was in the moment of composition; since first, last and all the time the composer is busy in music. It is music he writes; it is music we should hear. And whatever over and above music we get is so much to our gain, provided we still keep in touch with the music.

## VI.

On the whole it appears to me that the most satisfactory theory of the beautiful in music is that of Lotze, who in his "*Geschichte der Esthetik in Deutschland*" suggests three categories:

1. The pleasing in sensation (perception).
2. The beautiful in contemplation.
3. The beautiful in reflection.

The first two of these categories may be taken to correspond with the first two kinds of satisfaction I have mentioned. The third includes all that stirring of imagination and sympathy which great art gives out to sympathetic souls. It is impossible to strictly define the limits of this variety of satisfaction, even in the one art of music. Not alone does the myth of human feeling spontaneously form itself as we listen to any great music, there is something more, an impression as if the music itself were a living creature, a disembodied personality, a floating over-soul of sound, flowing through us and strangely and deeply stirring us.

The line of thought here traversed throws light upon a fact which many serious teachers of music have observed, but which as yet is unknown to our educated men; the fact, namely, that when music is studied seriously, in the spirit hereinbefore described, the student undergoes that maturing of mind which we recognize in education as growing strength and culture. I speak, naturally, not of the one-sided specialist who devotes prodigious hours to developing the different forms of what they call "technic"; but of that rational study of music, which reaches forward and

upwards so far beyond mere technic, and arrives so much better by mind and the open door of the soul than by practice. The explanation is that music, whether it be studied from a narrow and purely technical standpoint, or from this larger outlook of intelligent and sympathetic art-cognition, in both cases demands and necessitates the closest and most sensitive possible attention. Good luck takes a student but a very small way in the serious study of music. It takes mind. And the qualities of a really superior musical mind are in no respect below those of an accomplished mind in other directions. Wherefore, it would perhaps be well if, in some good time coming, the mental values of musical discipline could be measured and estimated in school work. But such an advance will naturally follow some time later than the general recognition of the penetrating mental qualities which alone give rise to the higher forms of musical creation. Man, cultivated man, is after all the great singing bird of the universe. And he sings because he feels, he thinks, he imagines, and he soars.

We may say definitely that the sensation of beauty experienced from music may be of many degrees and of many kinds. The entire sensuous side of music is beautiful in its degree—beauty (at least delight) of sensation in pitch and quality, in symmetries of rhythm, and so on. When we advance beyond the mere sensation to the intellectual enjoyment of music as a coherent and inspiring discourse, the sense of beauty rises in proportion to the good fortune of the composer in carrying out the moods and musical ideas he had in mind, and producing in them unities at once witty and beautiful.

There is in this part of music an exquisite fitness and adaptation, which of course needs to be understood and felt musically, before it is appreciated; but given the "ears to hear," it is beauty containing wonderfully varied sources of gratification.

Strength in music lies mainly in the purely musical management of the ideas, the melody and above all the harmony. Here is where great writers are greatest. As for satisfaction in music, perhaps we can do no better than agree with the popular sense, that after all the highest satisfaction to be found in music is that of being stirred in our inmost feelings; but the music lover is thus stirred only when the harp is handled by a master hand, having nobility and strength in his combinations, beauty in the melody and harmonies, and surrounding the whole that deeper sense of great art, which is so vastly greater than the greatest possible artifice. Beauty and purity cannot be separated; great art is pure art. And its limits are as yet beyond the ability of man to define.